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Key stakeholders urge Gov. Wolf to close loophole in state methane rulemaking that leaves half of climate-harming oil and gas emissions unchecked

PITTSBURGH (June 23, 2021) – A leading local elected official, a public health professional, and other key stakeholders in Pittsburgh called for immediate action to close a loophole for low-producing wells in the state’s draft methane rule that would leave over half of the state’s 1.1 million tons of annual oil and gas methane pollution unchecked.

Pittsburgh City Councilperson **Erika Strassburger** spoke at the press event, saying: “It’s no secret that the American Lung Association constantly gives Pittsburgh failing grades for our air quality. Methane emissions from oil and gas infrastructure not only contribute to climate change, the effects of which can be seen by the unprecedented rain events over the past two weeks that have caused dangerous flooding for my constituents, but also contribute to conditions of poor air quality that affect our high rates of childhood asthma and other respiratory health complications that are elevated in our state and region.”

Also speaking at the press event was **Deborah Gentile, MD**, Director of Allergy and Asthma Services at East Suburban Pediatrics and Medical Director of the newly formed nonprofit Community Partners in Asthma Care. Said Dr. Gentile: “Air pollution from the oil and gas industry is linked to asthma and other respiratory diseases, cancer, reproductive problems, blood disorders, neurological problems and adverse birth outcomes. Additionally, these pollutants contribute to global warming and increase the risk of tick borne and other infectious diseases, and worsening allergies and asthma, due to increased length and severity of pollen seasons and worsening mold exposure due to increased rainfall and flooding.”

The speakers reiterated that Gov. Wolf can help secure his legacy as a climate champion by enacting nation-leading methane rules supported by over 70 percent of Pennsylvania voters in a September 2020 poll.

Suparna Agrawal, a student at George Washington University and a climate activist, also spoke at the event. “Governor Wolf must act to close the loopholes in his proposed methane pollution regulations,” said Agrawal. “We have the opportunity in Pennsylvania to protect the health of our children and vulnerable populations, and give youth, like me, a chance at a real future.”

“The reality is when my children are my age, they will be left to deal with an even greater climate change crisis than what we are experiencing today in Pennsylvania if we don’t take meaningful and bold action to cut climate warming methane pollution now,” said **Vanessa Lynch**, Pennsylvania Field Organizer for Mom’s Clean Air Force, who emceed the press event.

The Department of Environmental Protection plans to bring its proposed final form methane rule to the state’s Environmental Quality Board this summer, with finalization of the rule expected by year end.

The event was live-streamed and can be viewed at: <https://www.facebook.com/MomsCleanAirForcePA>

About Erika Strassburger

Erika Strassburger is a member of Pittsburgh City Council, proudly serving the residents of the City’s 8th District. She is the first woman elected to this seat. Erika worked for nearly a decade advocating for clean air, clean water, and a clean energy future at the state and federal levels. She has been an outspoken advocate for policies promoting clean water and air, equitable and diverse communities, safe, complete streets, and an open, transparent, and responsive government. Erika lives in Squirrel Hill with her husband Jordan and her son Evan.

About Deborah Gentile, MD

Dr. Deborah Gentile is Director of Allergy and Asthma Services at East Suburban Pediatrics and Medical Director of the newly formed non-profit Community Partners in Asthma Care. She is board certified in allergy and immunology and has expertise in the diagnosis and treatment of allergy, asthma and immune disorders in infants, children and adults. She completed medical school, pediatric residency and allergy/immunology fellowship at the University of Pittsburgh. She previously worked at Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh, Allegheny Health Network and Pediatric Alliance, respectively. Her recent research efforts have focused on evaluating asthma outcomes and triggers in disparate children from the Pittsburgh Region. Dr. Gentile has authored more than 60 publications and is the recipient of numerous awards for her research efforts. She is past president of the her local and state allergy societies and is a member of numerous professional organizations.

About Suparna Agrawal

Suparna Agrawal is a rising college freshman at George Washington University in Washington DC. She will be majoring in political science as an extension of her work in government, community service, and social justice. Suparna has interned with Allegheny County Council, as well as Emily Skopov’s campaign for State Representative. Currently, Suparna is working as an intern at Pittsburgh Estate Law, and she hopes to extend this experience to her future career as a lawyer and public servant.

About Vanessa Lynch

Vanessa Lynch is Pennsylvania Field Organizer for Moms Clean Air Force, a community of more than one million moms and dads nationwide with over 96,000 members in Pennsylvania united against air pollution to equitably protect our children’s health. She lives with her husband and two children in Pittsburgh, where she has been actively advocating for children’s rights in education and environmental health. Pennsylvania has a long history of industrial activity and mineral extraction that has taken a toll on communities, and Vanessa has witnessed this firsthand as the oil and gas industry has brought fracking to her residential community. Since then, Vanessa has worked hard to protect children’s health at the local, state, and federal levels.